



March 7, 2022

Testimony submitted to the Connecticut State Transportation Committee

In SUPPORT of: section 2 of H.B. 5255 (motorcycle helmets)

In SUPPORT of: sections 4-5 of H.B. 5255 (variable speed limits during weather events)

COMMENTING on: sections 18 of H.B. 5255 (truck platooning)

Expressing CONCERN about: H.B. 5258 (move-over law)

This testimony is offered on behalf of both AAA clubs in Connecticut, AAA Club Alliance and AAA Northeast, which collectively represent over a million members statewide.

Motorcycle Helmets

AAA strongly supports section 2 of H.B. 5255, which would require all motorcycle riders and passengers to wear helmets; currently only those under 18 must use a helmet.

Motorcycle safety is trending in the wrong direction: Last week, the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) announced](#) that 38,824 people died on American roads in 2020 – the most since 2007. And [NHTSA estimates](#) that fatalities increased by approximately 12% in the first nine months of 2021 compared to the first nine months of 2020.

Connecticut is not immune to these trends. The UCONN Crash Data Repository reports that 319 people died on Connecticut roadways in 2020, the most in a decade.

As disheartening as these trends are, the numbers for motorcyclists are even worse. **In 2020, according to NHTSA, 5,579 motorcyclists were killed across the country – the most since the federal government started keeping records in 1975.** There was no statistically significant decrease in the number of motorcyclist injuries from 2019 to 2020, despite nearly all categories of road users showing decreases in injuries as people drove less during the early days of the pandemic.

In Connecticut, 55 motorcyclists died in 2020 – the most since 2008. **From 2015-2021, 188 motorcyclists were killed while not wearing a helmet** – equivalent to 57% of Connecticut motorcycle fatalities. In crashes where the motorcyclist was the only vehicle involved, 7% of unhelmeted riders were killed and 24% were seriously injured, compared with 4% and 14%, respectively, for helmeted riders. Unhelmeted adult motorcyclists were injured in 166 cities and towns.

There are many reasons for the increase in fatalities, including more drunk driving and speeding and lower seatbelt use, but a decrease in helmet usage among motorcyclists contributed as well. After reaching a peak of 71% in 2018, the percentage of riders using helmets declined to 69% in 2020 and 65% in 2021, according to a [NHTSA observational survey](#).

Helmets are effective: According to the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#), motorcycle helmets reduce the risk of death by 37-42%, and unhelmeted motorcyclists are 3x more likely than helmeted riders to suffer traumatic brain injuries.

Unhelmeted motorcyclists are twice as likely to suffer a [cervical spine injury](#); have [more head and face injuries](#), a greater [prevalence of facial fractures](#), and higher injury severity; and require longer ICU stays.

NHTSA estimates that 62 lives were saved by helmets in Connecticut from 2013-17, but 61 more fatalities could've been prevented – and nearly \$150 million in economic costs saved – with 100% helmet use.

Helmet laws are effective: Helmet laws unequivocally lead to more helmet usage. In [2021](#), 94% of riders in universal-helmet-law states (18 states + D.C.) wore helmets, compared to only 57% in states without such laws.

Helmet laws that apply only to young riders are near-impossible to enforce. There is evidence that [adolescent noncompliance](#) is much greater under partial laws, like Connecticut's, than under universal laws. And serious traumatic brain injury [among young riders](#) was 38% higher in states without universal laws.

States with helmet laws have [lower head, facial, and brain injuries](#) among motorcyclists, and studies that have [evaluated the change in helmet laws](#) produce unsurprising results as well. When California added a helmet law in 1992, the number of motorcyclist fatalities decreased by 37%; when Nebraska reinstated its helmet law in 1989, the number of serious head injuries among motorcyclists declined by 22%. By contrast, when Kentucky, Louisiana, and Florida repealed their universal helmet laws between 1998-2000, the number of motorcyclist fatalities increased. The [CDC has found](#) that adding helmet laws will increase helmet use and decrease death and injury rates; removing helmet laws will do the opposite.

As a result, it's no surprise that [NHTSA rates](#) a universal motorcycle helmet law a 5-star level of effectiveness as a safety countermeasure.

AAA agrees with helmet law opponents that it is not a silver bullet. We'd support additional interventions to promote safe riding and driving, and would be happy to collaborate on such efforts. But we believe that a helmet law is a significant piece of the puzzle, and we urge Connecticut legislators to pass it.

Variable speed limits

AAA supports sections 4-5 of H.B. 5255, which allow Connecticut DOT to set variable speed limits during a weather event or emergency. During our driver education and driver improvement classes, we teach students to select their speeds based on conditions, and this provision would encourage all drivers to follow such best practices.

The [Federal Highway Administration](#) (FHWA) lists variable speed limits as a "proven safety countermeasure" and suggests they can reduce highway crashes, including rear-end and fatal/injury crashes. DOT should have the ability to use this tool.

Truck platooning

AAA has no objection to section 18 of H.B. 5255, which allows truck platooning for 2-3 trucks/buses as long as Connecticut DOT approves a plan, the vehicles display an identifying mark, and each driver has the appropriate CDL and/or endorsement. Truck platooning has the potential to [improve safety and efficiency](#). The Federal Highway Administration reports positive results for fuel efficiency from Europe, Japan, and [initial American trials](#).

Safety must be the top priority for Connecticut DOT in deciding whether to approve a plan, even moreso than fuel economy or freight productivity. For this reason, we suggest the following provisions:

- Commercial vehicles carrying hazardous materials, fluids, or loose loads should not be allowed to participate in the platoons
- In the event of a collision with one of the vehicles in the platoon while the vehicles are engaged in platooning, all of the vehicles in the platoon should be required to stop
- Plans should have a specified expiration date (e.g., one year or two years), at which point DOT can review the platoon's performance (or the platoon can submit an additional application for a renewal) and decide whether to renew the permission to operate a platoon or let it expire. In lieu of this specific mechanism, DOT should have some mechanism by which to revoke a platoon's authorization if it fails to adhere to its plan.

- Plans should include the proposed spacing between the vehicles, the proposed route, and general timeframe of the platoon, in addition to specifics about the platooning technology.
- A copy of the plan – whether printed or electronic – should be available in each vehicle while it is being operated in a platoon.

Additionally, [research suggests](#) that truck platooning could contribute to obstruction of road signs. DOT should examine the routes where truck platoons will take place and consider whether to provide additional MUTCD-compliant signage to improve visibility for motorists.

Lastly, DOT and/or UCONN should submit a report about the effectiveness of the platoon program to the legislature.

Slow Down Move Over

First responders, tow truck drivers, and maintenance workers at the roadside deserve all the protection they can get. You won't find bigger supporters of the slow down move over law than AAA; we've worked to survey and educate our members about the law, and have created PSAs to do just that. Nevertheless, AAA has concerns about H.B. 5258, which would require drivers approaching emergency vehicles at the roadside to slow down to 20mph, a change from the current requirement to slow down to a "reasonable level below the posted speed limit." We believe this change would pose dangers to other road users while not providing any additional protection to first responders.

Forcing all drivers, including those in the left-most lane, to reduce speed to 20mph on a 65 mph road could cause crashes if even one driver is not paying close enough attention. Of course, all drivers should be monitoring road conditions, but such a speed differential could be deadly – and drivers may not comply with the new law out of fear that they'll be rear-ended if they do.

AAA is not aware of any other states with similarly worded laws. Some states have requirements that drivers slow a specified amount below the speed limit:

- [Washington State](#) requires drivers who are unable to change lanes away from an emergency vehicle to slow down to at least 10mph below the speed limit.
- [Pennsylvania](#) and [Texas](#) require drivers who are unable to leave the lane adjacent to an emergency vehicle to slow down to at least 20mph below the speed limit.
- [South Dakota](#) requires drivers approaching emergency vehicles on the side of a two-lane highway to slow down to at least 20mph below the speed limit.

While we are not aware of any research demonstrating the superiority of either the "reasonable level below the limit" standard or the "10/20 mph below the limit" standard, we are happy to continue the conversation with legislators and other stakeholders about how to ensure the move over law best protects our first responders and roadside workers and how to increase compliance with the law. However, we are not convinced that requiring a blanket 20mph limit would be an effective way to achieve this goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tracy Noble
Manager, Public and Govt Affairs
AAA Club Alliance
815 Farmington Ave
West Hartford, CT 06107
(860) 570-4319
tnoble@aaamidatlantic.com

Alec Slatky
Director, Public and Govt Affairs
AAA Northeast
2276 Whitney Ave
Hamden, CT 06518
(401) 200-0513
aslatky@aanortheast.com